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DYNAMIC

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Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF SHANNON CAZEAU FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

[1](#)1. (S) SUMMARY. With two weeks remaining before Guinea faces the March 31 deadline for resuming a nationwide labor strike, various political actors are working quietly behind the scenes to define the next stage of the country's ongoing political and economic struggle. A parallel dialogue process spearheaded by opposition political parties and the labor unions seeks to develop a unified strategy for change. While some actors are calling for cooler heads and working towards legislative elections in December, others are pushing to demand the president's resignation. Diverse groups and diverse interests agree that the president is the problem, but are still trying to find a solution acceptable to all. In the meantime, various political actors appear to be making calculated moves aimed at improving their chances of emerging victorious when the president's position comes up for grabs, whether that be in the next few weeks or the next few years. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (S) In order to develop a better understanding of the political dynamic unfolding in Guinea as the country moves towards a March 31 deadline set by the labor unions (reftel A), Poloff met with range of actors who are participating in a parallel dialogue process aimed at developing a unified strategic platform for resolving Guinea's leadership crisis. Following the March 4 meeting with Dr. Fofana of the Union of Guinean Workers (USTG) (reftel B), Poloff met with Mme Saran Kaba of the Mano River Union Women's Network NGO on March 10, with opposition leader Ousmane Bah of the Union for Progress and Renewal (UPR) party on March 11, with opposition leader Sidya Toure of the Union Force Republican (UFR) party on March 12, with the Coordination of Wisemen on March 13, and with Lt. Colonel Vivace, a member of the civil-military committee the U.S. Government helped establish a few years ago, also on March 13.

A PARALLEL DIALOGUE

[1](#)3. (S) In January 2008, the labor unions and the government agreed to establish a Committee de Suivi as a mechanism for reviewing the implementation of the January 2007 Accords that led to the consensus government and Prime Minister Lansana Kouyate's appointment (reftel A) in March. However, few political actors seem to believe that the Committee process will result in a concrete solution to Guinea's underlying political tensions. This is due in part to the fact that the Committee is chaired by the President of the National

Assembly, and that participants include high-level representation from Guinea's two other republican institutions, the Supreme Court and the Economic and Social Council. Furthermore, the Committee effectively excludes opposition political party participation. As a result, various leaders began a parallel dialogue process to allow broader participation and to create a generally acceptable, unifying platform for pursuing political change. This parallel group has met several times over the past two months. It includes opposition political parties, the unions, civil society, religious leaders, the Coordination of Wisemen, and the civil-military committee. Participants say that the ruling Party for Unity and Progress was invited, but has not joined the meetings.

14. (S) With such a diverse group of actors, there appears to be a broad spectrum of possible courses of action for the coming months. On the right are the advocates of keeping the peace, staying calm, and working diligently towards free and fair, transparent legislative elections at the end of the year. At the other extreme are those calling for the president to be removed so that a period of political transition leading to prompt presidential elections can be ushered in. Participants told Poloff that they are hoping to agree on a common strategy before the end of March, but that the process may take them into early to mid April.

THE PROBLEM IS THE PRESIDENT

15. (S) While there is much debate as to possible solutions, everyone seems to agree on the fundamental underlying problems. Contacts independently told Poloff that the

CONAKRY 00000011 002 OF 005

country needs a regime change and the only way Guinea will be able to advance democratically and economically is if the president is removed from office, either literally or practically. There was a general consensus as well that Prime Minister Kouyate is increasingly becoming a liability and has failed to fulfill his mandate. Contacts commented on continued economic hardship, lack of basic infrastructure, and general frustration with endemic corruption and weak governance.

THE VOICES OF CALM

16. (S) Although civil society contacts are just as dissatisfied with the president and the consensus government as other actors, they appear to be more conservative in their views of how change should be achieved. According to Mme Kaba of the Mano River Union Women's Network, legislative elections are the key to peaceful, democratic progress. She told Poloff that "elections are the only alternative that can satisfy everyone." For Kaba, one of the main reasons behind the parallel dialogue process is to provide a mechanism for unifying various actors in order to avoid a possible labor strike and the violence that could follow. She said that Guinea's return to an IMF funded program is a significant consideration and that political actors recognize that a return to instability and possible violence could jeopardize much needed progress on economic reforms.

17. (S) However, Kaba pointed out that this strategy will only work if the situation remains relatively static. She noted that the president's office has been quietly picking away at the consensus government and provoking the population. Kaba told Poloff that there are essentially two possible paths over the coming months. On the one hand, the presidency may continue to push with relatively insignificant actions that irritate the population but do not dissuade them from peacefully pursuing legislative elections. The other possibility is that the presidency does something absolutely

unacceptable, causing the populace to react violently, likely resulting in a military intervention. According to Kaba, Guinea's youth are impatient and want change immediately, and may be eager for open conflict. She said that it would not take much to spark a negative reaction. When asked what kind of presidential action might be considered unacceptable, Kaba said that replacing the Minister of Interior and Security, who is responsible for elections, would be unforgivable, as would be replacing the PM. She said that even if the population is unhappy with the PM, they would likely protest on principle since it would undermine the January 2007 Accords.

THE RADICALS

18. (S) At the other end of the spectrum are those who want to call for the president to step down in order to create an immediate period of political transition leading to presidential elections. Dr. Fofana of USTG is in this camp (reftel B) as is Sidya Toure of the UFR political party. According to Sidya Toure, the Committee de Suivi is irrelevant because the January 2007 Accords are irrelevant. He told Poloff that the president is at the root of Guinea's political and economic problems and the country cannot afford to wait two or three years for either presidential elections or Conte's death. Toure said that the dialogue group will likely call for the president to step down, although various actors have not yet agreed on a common strategy. When asked about the possible labor strike, Sidya said that the strike would only support Kouyate, which is something he is not interested in. However, when Poloff asked what would happen if "Les Force Vivres" demanded the president's resignation, he said that it is possible that the presidency will refuse, which could usher in a strike. He noted that such a strike would not be economic in nature, but rather, a sort of socio-political strike against the government, with broad based popular support.

19. (S) Poloff commented that a call for the president's resignation could escalate political tensions and encourage violence, much like in early 2007. Sidya said that "we would have violence anyway if we go forward with the unions' strike; we cannot let things continue in this way." He added that the situation is also different from the previous year in that he and other political actors can draw on the lessons learned in 2007. "We have experience this time around," he

CONAKRY 00000011 003 OF 005

said. Sidya said that the president is not capable of resisting (reftel C) and that three of his long-time generals are dead. When Poloff asked if the military would support a call for impeachment, Sidya said "that is why we invited them to participate in our dialogue; the situation is different now."

10. (S) As for elections, Sidya said that legislative elections are irrelevant and the country should be focused on presidential elections. He said that no one party will win a clear majority in legislative elections, which will create a free for all in the National Assembly and block any progress towards reforms. "The same situation will continue," he said. Poloff asked Sidya who would serve as head of government during a political transition, pointing out that it would be some months before presidential elections could be organized. Sidya said that it will be a big debate, but that it should be someone non-partisan, and definitely not the PM. He said that Monsignor Robert Sara has been suggested as well as Monsignor Gomez. Sidya added that elections could be organized very quickly if necessary since the main challenge is the voter registration process, which is scheduled to start in April.

IN THE MIDDLE

¶11. (S) As usual, fellow opposition leader Ousmane Bah, of the UPR, was more circumspect and cautious than Sidya. He agreed that the president is the problem, and that the PM has been ineffective. Bah said that a period of political transition will be necessary, but it is unclear as to whether such a transition will be intentional or accidental. Bah echoed some of Mme Kaba's comments in that he also seemed to see two possible paths. He said that successful legislative elections and a new National Assembly could serve as a mechanism for an organized period of political transition. However, Bah added that transparent, timely elections are not guaranteed, and that the current climate of uncertainty creates opportunities for actions that could push the country towards an "accidental" period of political transition.

¶12. (S) When asked about potentially divisive decisions originating from the president's office, Bah said that the president can replace any minister he wants, but that will not necessarily generate a negative reaction. According to Bah, the key is how the president does it and who he chooses as the replacement.

The "Mediators"

¶13. (S) The Coordination of Wisemen was represented by the four leaders of each of Guinea's natural regions, who self-identified themselves by ethnicity: the Fulani, the Malinke, the Soussou, and the Forest tribes. Through the course of the conversation, the ethnic leaders repeatedly emphasized their neutrality and the fact that they are non-partisan. At one point, the Malinke leader said "our job is to mediate; we do not take sides." However, they were also highly critical of the government, including both the president and the PM, in a non-direct way. The Fulani leader pointed out that the consensus government has failed to achieve even one-third of the objectives outlined in the January 2007 Accords. He commented at length on the economic hardships the country continues to face, hinting that these problems are not exclusive to Kouyate, but to years of weak governance. The leaders acknowledged that they are participating in the parallel dialogue process, but emphasized that they are there to provide advice. When Poloff asked what kind of advice they were giving, they said that they do not get involved in politics and do not influence political decisions; they just arbitrate.

The Military

¶14. (S) Lt. Colonel Vivace, an officer in Guinea's Air Force, told Poloff and DATT that the unions will not go through with the strike. When Poloff commented that Vivace is a member of the civ-mil committee and participating in the dialogue process, Vivace coyly said "you can say that." However, he revealed nothing about the actual negotiations and the role the military is playing in that dialogue process.

CONAKRY 00000011 004 OF 005

¶15. (S) According to Vivace, Guinea does not have any problems, only economic maladies. He said that people are complaining about the price of goods, but that the reality is that commodities are actually cheaper in Guinea than anywhere else in West Africa. He blamed the Kouyate government for ongoing economic problems such as rising prices and poor infrastructure.

¶16. (S) As for the unions, Vivace said "they are not that powerful" and emphasized that the consensus government that the unions put in office has failed, so the unions have nothing to stand on as the country approaches a possible

labor strike. He added that the unions are irrational and have overstepped their bounds, asking "is it normal for labor unions to demand the removal of the chief of state?" Vivace said that the real power in Guinea is the women and children, but that they will not support a strike. "We have succeeded in sensitizing the youth and they will not be participating in any strike," he said. According to Vivace, the political debate is centered on Conakry and if a strike is called, there will be no reaction from the provinces.

¶17. (S) Conversely, Mme Kaba's personal opinion was that the military wants a better quality of life just like everyone else and is likely to play a role in the coming months, especially if things come to a head with a nationwide strike. She noted that the younger soldiers are increasingly dissatisfied, but that they do not have a clear leader. Kaba said that "if they are sincere, they will not intervene in a partisan way, but just calm the situation and help establish a peaceful transition leading to presidential elections."

COMMENT

¶18. (S) While it is still unclear what things will look like at the end of the month, the various key political actors are talking with each other and making progress towards a unified plan. There are voices advocating for calm, but there seem to be more people pushing for more direct action. They acknowledge that it could lead to violence, but do not have a clear idea of how to resolve the situation if it gets to that point. For those who are advocating for a regime change (Fofana and Sidya), their ideas as to how a political transition would work and who would lead it are vague at best. If the president is indeed incapacitated (reftel C), intentionally provocative actions originating from the presidency are increasingly likely. Various political actors appear to be making calculated political moves aimed at improving their chances of coming out on top when the president's position comes up for grabs, regardless of whether that is by "accident or intention." Civil society seems to be more concerned with the general underlying issues while the political parties, the labor unions, the president's office, the PM's office, and the military more likely have their eye on the big prize.

¶19. (S) The dialogue process seems to be spearheaded by the opposition political parties and the labor unions. However, the group has not confronted the government (either Conte or Kouyate) and various contacts have told Poloff that they prefer to define their platform before discussing it with the government. Several contacts have emphasized that they have invited wide participation, but the PUP, for example, has chosen to abstain. It is increasingly looking like "Les Force Vivres" will decide what it is they want to do and then simply present it to the government with a "take it or leave it" attitude. Among those who are advocating for a regime change, there seems to be a sense that they were at this point in 2007, but backed down prematurely. They may be less willing to back down this time around.

¶20. (S) The meeting with Colonel Vivace was particularly troubling. He appeared to be completely out of touch with reality. It seemed that for him, the military is in charge and the people are unlikely to revolt. Several of his comments led to the distinct impression that he sees the general population as ignorant, uninformed, and unconcerned. His attention seemed to be focused on the labor unions, which he discounted as a significant political force. Since his name came up as one of the military officers participating in the dialogue, his comments were surprising since he would have assumably been privy to the broader political context and discussions which go beyond the unions. He seemed genuine in his commentary, but he may have been simply giving us the party line. Embassy is aware of another civ-mil contact in the gendarmerie and will follow up with him next

week in order to get a better sense of the military's perspective on and role in this dialogue process. END COMMENT.

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